

SHINOBU TERAJIMA

JOSH HARTNETT

OH LUCY!

オー・ルーシー!

AN ATSUKO HIRAYANAGI FILM



SEMAINE
DE LA CRITIQUE
CANNES 2017



MERIDIAN
CONTENT

Alicia SANCHEZ
PRODUCTIONS



elle.
DRIVER

SYNOPSIS

SETSUKO (Shinobu Terajima) is seemingly stuck with her life in Tokyo until she is convinced by her niece, **MIKA** (Shioli Kutsuna), to enroll in an unorthodox English class that requires her to wear a blonde wig and take on an American persona named 'LUCY.' The new identity awakens something dormant in Setsuko, and she quickly falls for her American instructor, **JOHN** (Josh Hartnett). When John suddenly disappears from class and Setsuko learns he and Mika were in fact dating, she enlists the help of her sister, **AYAKO** (Kaho Minami) and flies halfway across the world to the outskirts of Southern California in search of the runaway couple. In a brave new world of tattoo parlors and seedy motels, family ties and past lives are tested as Setsuko struggles to preserve the dream and promise of 'Lucy.'





Shinobu Terajima
AS SETSUKO / LUCY



Kaho Minami
AS AYAKO

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

“As a storyteller, I am attracted to the quiet ones, because they are the ones who have more to say. I like to imagine what they would do if given the permission to be loud. Oh Lucy! is the result of this imagination.

I myself turned into the ‘quiet one’ when I was a 17-year-old exchange student from Japan in the United States. I couldn’t speak English, and was immediately perceived as a quiet Asian girl. There was the persona that people saw me as, and then there was the real me, who wanted to express herself. These two personas were in constant struggle to be one. That experience is reflected in Setsuko’s journey.

As a mother of two young kids, I learned by observing them that wanting to be heard is an innate behavior in us humans. They would act out and sometimes even destroy things when they’re not heard and want attention. I felt they’re trying to tell us that they exist.

As we grow into adults, we learn to control ourselves, yet I feel our need to be heard never goes away. I feel our voice is always looking for a place to exist. For me, films are that place – the place for our voice to be heard, and a place that acknowledges our existence.”

- ATSUKO HIRAYANAGI



BIOGRAPHY

Atsuko Hirayanagi was born in Nagano and raised in Chiba, Japan. She is a graduate of NYU Tisch School of The Arts with an MFA in Film Production. Her second year project, MO IKKAI, won the Grand Prix at the 2012 Short Shorts Film Festival in Asia. Her thesis short film, OH LUCY!, received a First Prize Wasserman Award and also won more than 25 awards around the globe, including prizes at Cannes, Sundance and Toronto film festivals. OH LUCY! is the feature-length version of this film, and has already received the 2016 Sundance / NHK Award during development.

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

One of the first things that one wonders after seeing OH LUCY! is who the filmmaker is. It's such a unique and specific story that encapsulates a real understanding of both Japanese and American culture. It also manages to be a universal story about awakening to life's possibilities. Can you tell us a little bit about your background? Where are you from and how did that influence your film?

I was born and raised in Japan, and at 17 I went to the US as a foreign-exchange student in Los Angeles. I went to a public high school in Los Feliz, of all places, and it sure wasn't BEVERLY HILLS 90210. It was such an eye-opening experience (and one I may write about someday). For the film, I definitely drew from my experience of being an outsider, and being labeled as a "quiet Asian girl," since I couldn't speak much English. I noticed back then that I almost had two personalities – the "American me" and the Japanese me. I felt like I was consistently looking at these two characters objectively. Then I realized that I am neither one of those characters. This theme is explored in the film.

OH LUCY! began as a short film that gained considerable success screening at Sundance, Cannes, and SXSW, among many other festivals. Can you talk a little bit about where the idea came from and how you expanded it into a feature? Were you always intending to create a feature?

The idea came from a class exercise, where we were asked to write about "someone you know" in life. I picked someone in my life who was the least likely to be portrayed as a heroine in a film. The person I picked was one who always seemed to be hiding her true feelings, and I wanted to see what it would take to get her to speak her mind, and see how far she would go if given the permission to. So I gave her a new identity: Lucy. Funnily enough, the idea was to write a feature initially, but my professor, who is now the other writer of OH LUCY! [Boris Frumin], told me, "No, that's not a feature, it's a short." So I wrote it as a short and shot it as my thesis film. It's a funny process in hindsight, as I first compressed the idea into a short, then expanded it into a feature.

The film begins in Japan and starts with a suicide followed by a retirement party. Most of the settings are drab and depressing. This becomes even more noticeable when the action shifts to America, which is brighter and more open. John also teaches Lucy that American English should sound "lazy and more relaxed." Can you talk a little bit about the cultural connotations of the film and what you are trying to say with them?

I'm not trying to say something. It's just the way it is. I feel we are all the same underneath our masks, and I wanted to show those unmasked moments of reality in Japan.

As for the contrast with the US, again, we're not so different from each other – our fundamental needs and fears are the same.

America, “the land of the free” – that phrase is the first thing that many Japanese people associate the country with, and it has a magical power. America is free, big and has endless open spaces and wide horizons. It has a funny spell on us. Setsuko's first experience of the US is of the shady back streets of San Fernando though, rather than the sun-soaked beaches of “LA.” The truth is that reality is not that romantic.

Did you approach the shooting in Japan differently than you did in America?

We tried to shoot the same way we shot in the States. The Japan team was very accommodating. It was challenging sometimes, especially under the time crunch, and that probably put some strain on the Japan crew too. They're very understanding and professional.

How did you and your DP and production designer create the look and feel of the film?

It took a lot of photo exchanges and location scouting to find and create the space that would look and feel authentic to the story. Finding the right locations was crucial, time-consuming and nerve-racking at the same time, since our budget was so limited. We didn't have the luxury to re-create anything entirely with production design, except for the small convenience store on the train platform in the opening scene.

The film is quite funny at times. Can you tell us about your approach to humor? It's often very dark and often arises from discomfort or cultural confusion. One has the sense sometimes that one shouldn't laugh, but then can't help but do so.

I find humor when people are too dead serious and too caught up in the moment. When someone trips, what's funny is not the fact that the person tripped, it's funny because that person tried to act like it didn't happen – even if her/his face is all red. If someone farts at a funeral, it's so funny because we all try to act like it didn't happen, while kids are cracking up out loud and parents are smacking their children's heads. We all want to laugh, but we of course hold our laughter to be “polite.” But when we're watching a film, it's okay to be ourselves. I like showing those moments.

Did you improv? There is a sense of lightness in many of the scenes.

We did some improv within the parameters of the story and the script. When I felt things didn't look quite natural, I asked actors to go wherever they wanted to move, or to say the lines however they wanted to say them, using their impulses. I'm not attached to the exact lines that I wrote as long as the new ones convey the same feeling and don't lose the nuance. For the same reason, I don't like rehearsing and many takes, as it loses the rawness and spontaneity of the

moment. Same goes for blocking. It was magical working with Terajima-san and the other lead actors who also valued the same approach. Every take felt special.

How did you approach the casting? Shinobu Terajima and Koji Yakusho have been such important actors in Japanese cinema, starring in films by directors like Kiyoshi Kurosawa, Koji Wakamatsu and Shohei Imamura. Can you talk about your casting process and how you work with the actors? Is there any rehearsal?

We auditioned almost everyone except the lead actors. Per the answer above, I didn't do any rehearsals with actors. We talked about the characters in depth prior to the shoot though. We talked about who they are, what they are like. I really like working with actors on the set. I like working with whatever they bring that day, to that moment, at that location and set. I heard director [Hirokazu] Koreeda saying that casting is 80% of directing, and I also believe in that. If you find the right actor, you don't have to do much on the set, actually. That's what happened for OH LUCY!. I was extremely blessed with actors.

It's a great pleasure to see Josh Hartnett back on screen and in something as surprising as this. How did he get involved? Was your approach to working with him any different than with the Japanese cast?

I read an article about Josh leaving Hollywood at the peak of his career to take some time off, and something about that really spoke to me. I asked my agent if we could speak to him, and when we finally met, we immediately clicked. He knew exactly who John is and what he meant to the story. Josh has so many deep and very interesting layers to him. He put so much thought into the character, and had great ideas and questions about John, which enriched the character and made him more specific. Josh was simply a great collaborator.

What was the biggest challenge on the film?

The biggest challenge was being away from my two young kids. On the production side, coming from a student thesis shoot, where you have to do so many things yourself, I felt the feature was easier, as you have so many more people helping you, and they're professional. I could just focus on directing on the set. I am so grateful for our incredible teams both in Japan and the US. I can't thank the producers enough for bringing this team together.



Josh Hartnett

AS JOHN

CAST

SHINOBU TERAJIMA (SETSUKO / LUCY)

Shinobu Terajima was born in Kyoto, Japan, and is the daughter of the renowned Kabuki actor and national living treasure, Onoe Kikugorō, and Japanese actress, Sumiko Fuji. She is considered one of the most critically acclaimed and visible actresses of her generation in Japan, known for her daring and fearless performances. She has won numerous awards across the world, for both film and theater, including Best Actress at the 27th Japanese Academy Awards for her performance in *Akame 48 Waterfalls* and the Silver Bear for Best Actress at the 60th Berlin International Film Festival for her performance in *Caterpillar*.



KAHO MINAMI (Ayako)

Kaho Minami is most well-known internationally for starring in Gakuryu Ishii's *Angel Dust*. She has also appeared in *Infection*, *The Go Master*, and *Sketches of Kaitan City*. She has flourished in lead and supporting roles in numerous Japanese feature productions including a festival darling *Kabukicho Love Hotel* in 2014.



SHIOLI KUTSUNA (Mika)

Shioli Kutsuna was born and raised in Sydney, Australia. She won a major teen beauty contest in 2006 and made her acting debut the following year. In 2013 she won the Best Newcomer Award for the Japanese remake of *Unforgiven* at the Japan Academy Award, and recently starred opposite Jared Leto and Emile Hirsch in Martin Zandvliet's *The Outsider*.



CAST

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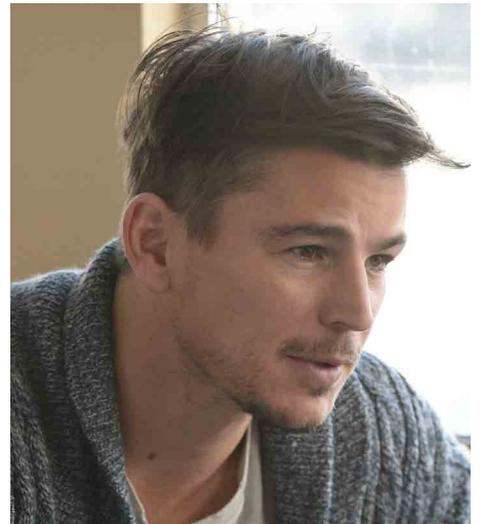
with
KOJI YAKUSHO (Komori / Tom)

A long-standing legend in Japanese cinema and well-known internationally for his roles in *Memoirs of a Geisha* and *Babel*, Koji Yakusho originally got a break-through on the NHK series *Tokugawa Ieyasu*. He enjoyed critical acclaim for his role in *Shall We Dance?* and in *The Eel*, directed by Shohei Imamura, which won the Palm D'Or at the 1997 Cannes Film Festival. More recently, he appeared as the lead in Takashi Miike's *13 Assassins*, where he plays the fierce samurai, Shimada Shinzaemon.



and
JOSH HARTNETT (John)

Josh Hartnett first burst onto the indie scene with the critically acclaimed debut film of Sofia Coppola, *The Virgin Suicides*, and shortly thereafter, catapulted into superstardom when he played one of the lead roles in Michael Bay's *Pearl Harbor*. This was followed by a string of hits as the lead in *O.*, *40 Days & 40 Nights*, and Ridley Scott's, *Black Hawk Down*. Josh then took a hiatus from Hollywood life to focus on self and family, but recently came back onto the scene with his powerful performance in John Logan's hit television show, *Penny Dreadful*.



CREW

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Masaya Kusakabe

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Jason Hougaard

MUSIC
Erik Friedlander

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Yukie Kito
Jessica Elbaum
Atsuko Hirayangi

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS
Razmig Hovaghimian
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